



**House Committee on Government Operations  
June 20, 2017  
HB 4053- Opposed**

A state's language policy can profoundly impact every aspect of an individual's life: interactions with law enforcement and the court system, communications with elected representatives, access to jobs, health care, and emergency assistance. The ACLU of Michigan opposes HB 4053 because it is divisive and inconsistent with federal protections of free speech and equal access.

A declaration of English as the official language of the State of Michigan is inconsistent with the free speech protections of the First Amendment and the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, which embodies a spirit of tolerance and diversity embodied in the federal Constitution. Our country has always been a land of linguistic diversity. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2007 survey, over 19 percent of the U.S. population (55 million) speaks a language other than English at home. The 2000 Census found that over 20 million individuals reportedly spoke English less than "very well," including 5.6 million native-born Americans. Approximately 10 million adults in the U.S. spoke English "not well" or "not at all."

Although clearly unintended, if enacted, HB 4053 will have the effect of isolating and marginalizing many of these limited English proficient individuals. By simply leaving departments the discretion to determine if they will provide official government documents in languages other than English rather than require it upon individual request, this will restrict the access critical government information and services for many limited English proficient individuals and may prevent them from effectively petitioning their government and freely exchanging information with government officials and employees. This may also discourage and prevent many individuals from participating fully in court proceedings, such as traffic court, eviction proceedings, or family court. Such restrictions deny Americans who have limited English skills, both citizens and

immigrants, some of their most basic rights. Accordingly, these divisive policies run afoul the civil rights laws requiring equal access to government services regardless of race or national origin.

In addition to encouraging division by excluding and stigmatizing people who comprise an important part of our communities, HB 4053 does nothing to address the real problem: the severe shortage in affordable English-language classes for the millions of limited English proficient individuals seeking to improve their English. While more immigrants seek to become fluent in English and our society passes laws requiring it, there are insufficient educational resources to meet the enormous demand. Policies such as this are an unfortunate response to the perceived threat from the diversity of voices contributed by new immigrants. Ultimately, the government should increase resources for English language learning rather than adopt divisive laws.

Respectfully submitted,

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